



**File Code:** 1950/2810

**Date:** October 13, 2011

Dear Interested Party:

The Whitman Ranger District of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (WWNF) and the North Fork John Day Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forests (UNF) are moving forward with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess the effects of the Granite Creek Watershed Mining Plans proposal. The Notice of Intent to prepare this EIS was published in the Federal Register on October 11, 2011.

Both forests had previously initiated environmental analyses for proposed mining Plans of Operation (Plans) in the portions of the Granite Creek Watershed under their administration. As issues were identified by each forest were similar, it became clear that combining the analysis into one EIS would be the most efficient way to complete the task.

### **Preliminary Issues**

The interdisciplinary team has conducted field surveys and data research to identify preliminary issues of concern with this proposal. The primary concern is the potential for sediment or heavy metal discharges into streams from mining operations, potentially impacting water quality, fish and fish habitat (pools and temperature).

Within the Granite Creek Watershed, under section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has listed Beaver Creek and Clear Creek as water quality limited for temperature, and Bull Run Creek and Granite Creek as water quality limited for temperature and sediment. Fish species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act occurring within the watershed include bull trout and middle Columbia River steelhead trout. Based on these preliminary issues and the level of activity proposed at some sites, there is the potential for significant impacts to some resources, therefore an EIS fits the scope of this analysis rather than an Environmental Assessment (EA).

These issues, along with other issues raised during public scoping, will be addressed in the EIS. Based on these issues, the action alternatives may vary in the type and timing of permitted operations, and additional operational requirements.

This EIS will evaluate and approve 30 proposed mining Plans (17 on the WWNF, 11 on the UNF, and 2 overlapping both forests), and evaluate and propose additional operational requirements for some or all of these Plans. Authorization of Plan approvals would occur after



receipt of 401 certification as deemed necessary by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

The Granite Creek Mining Watershed Mining Plans project area is located on the Whitman Ranger District of the WWNF, approximately 45 miles west of Baker City, Oregon, and on the North Fork John Day Ranger District of the UNF, approximately 45 miles south of Ukiah, Oregon. The decision area will cover 30 proposed mining Plans of Operation within the Granite Creek Watershed, an area of approximately 94,479 acres of National Forest System lands, in Baker and Grant Counties. Typically, each project will disturb and reclaim an area of approximately 1-2 acres annually. A vicinity map is enclosed.

The proposed action in the EIS is to authorize the approval of Plans as submitted by the operators for mining projects within the analysis area. These Plans describe the types of mining operations and how they would be conducted, the type and location of access routes, means of transportation to be used, the period during which the mining activity would take place, and measures to be taken to meet the requirements for environmental protection, including reclamation. Of the 30 proposed projects to be evaluated in this EIS, 22 are placer projects, 3 are lode, 5 are a combination of lode and placer. One Plan includes a proposal for constructing one-half mile of haul road to access an existing lode mine. The enclosed table summarizes the location and types of activities associated with each Plan.

## **Review and Comment**

I encourage you to review the enclosed table of proposed projects and to respond to me with your comments. This is offered as a starting point. The interdisciplinary team will be reviewing your comments and incorporating your ideas into the development of alternatives. Any comments already received will be considered and included in the EIS process. Please direct your written comments and concerns to Jeff Tomac at the Whitman Ranger District, 3165 10<sup>th</sup> St., Baker City, OR 97814, by Nov 10, 2011. If you have questions concerning the project and development of the EIS, please telephone Sophia Millar, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at (541) 263-1735.

Sincerely,



JEFF TOMAC  
Whitman Ranger  
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest



ROBERT VARNER  
North Fork John Day Ranger  
Umatilla National Forest

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and address of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that under FOIA confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where this is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address, within 10 days.

Enclosures:

- (1) Proposed Action Table of Operations
- (2) Vicinity Map

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